

Port City Scores With Solid "Kiss"

Sensitive drama deals with hate crime's consequences.

By Brad Hathaway

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The performances of Amy Miharu Hard and Wendy Lamond-Broughton as two young women who think of themselves as heterosexuals, but who find themselves attracted to each other in a very sexual way, make the Port City Playhouse production of the drama "Stop Kiss" a fine evening of theater.

The play has been around now for almost a decade being produced by small regional theaters. It was written by New York based playwright Diana Son who also writes for television. She wrote a number of episodes of "Law and

Order: Criminal Intent" and "The West Wing." Now the play is beginning to get productions at community theaters, especially those with a habit of tackling serious works on serious themes. Port City Playhouse fits that description, having just won the Washington Area Theatre Community Honors (WATCH) award for outstanding play of the year for its "Hauptmann," which dealt with the guilt or innocence of the man executed in the Lindbergh baby kidnapping of 1932. Last year they mounted a solid production of August Wilson's "Fences," an examination of racial attitudes in the 1950s. They have such important works as "The Elephant Man," Harold Pinter's "Betrayal" and Craig Wright's lyrical play about time, the consequences of mistakes and the desire to fix the unfixable, "The Pavilion," to their credit.

Now, add "Stop Kiss," a one-act collection of scenes flashing forward and backward to tell the story of two independent young women in New York City who are surprised to find themselves attracted to each other and who are attacked by a homophobic stranger who sees them kiss in a public place. The attack is so severe that it puts one of them into a coma.

THE SEVEN-MEMBER cast does a fine job with the material while the performance of the two leading actresses are clearly the standout work of the evening. Lamond-Broughton is making her local stage debut in the role of

the young woman who has come to New York to take a job as a school teacher in the Bronx. She brings a comfortable stage presence to the role, making one hope that this won't be her last appearance in the region.

Hard, on the other hand, is already well known for her talent. She's the 2003 WATCH award winner for her work in the Little Theatre of Alexandria's production of the adult comedy "Sylvia" in which she handled the title part, that of a pet dog. She's also active back stage at a number of local theaters and is the Theatre Department Chair at Fairfax's Robinson Middle School.

The story is a simple one, but the important factor is that the audience come to know and care for the two women, not just watch their developing affection and the pain of the subsequent attack. Under Zina Bleck's sensitive direction, the two become very real people who are easy to care about.

The script allows them to trade stories of their boy friends before introducing their attraction to each other or the attack. Their development of the affection between their characters is subtly done allowing it to seem to come as a surprise to them that they could, in fact, be attracted to a member of their own sex. It is a thoughtful treatment of the subject and raises a number of issues which may well lead to

Where & When

The Port City Playhouse production of "Stop Kiss" plays this Friday and Sunday at 8 p.m. at the Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson Street, Alexandria. Tickets are \$12 - \$14. Call 703-838-2880 or visit

www.portcityplayhouse.com.



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interesting post-show discussions over a cup of coffee or in the car on the way home.

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